

News Release



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SUMMER CAMPING SEASON COULD BE BUSIEST EVER

“Turn out the lights and go camping – that’s what people seem to be telling us.” – State Parks Director Rusty Areias.

SACRAMENTO – The summer camping season at California state parks could be historic, the busiest on record, because of this year’s cut in camping fees combined with rising energy costs, State Parks Director Rusty Areias said today.

The latest information shows park attendance up anywhere from 22 percent to 40 percent, with the busiest months of the season – June, July and August – still ahead. That means attendance at many of the most popular locations could go even higher and is clearly headed toward record levels.

Camping fees were reduced at the beginning of the year, to a maximum of \$12 per night (\$18 for sites equipped with RV hookups), and an attendance report released Friday already shows a 22-percent increase in camping at state parks in the first three months following the camping fee cut.

In addition, the new attendance figures show a 40 percent increase in paid day use at state parks during the first three months of this year, when compared to the average of the first three months of the previous three years.

“The preliminary data we are seeing indicate we are headed toward the busiest summer camping season on record in the State of California,” Areias said today. “We think it is being caused by a combination of factors that has the public looking for ways to save money but still enjoy a nice vacation.”

Energy prices could be a factor in this summer’s attendance, Areias said. Using current prices, the natural gas and electricity bill for a weekend at home would be about \$40 for the average family of four, according to the Pacific Gas & Electric Company. Camping fees for a weekend at a state park could cost \$24 or less.

“Turn out the lights and go camping – that’s what people seem to be telling us,” Areias said.

(more)

As part of Gov. Gray Davis' effort to make state parks accessible to more people, camping fees were reduced in many campgrounds by more than half, effective at the beginning of this year. Day use fees were cut in half beginning last July.

Camping at state parks was up 22 percent during the first three months of this year. While weather also affects campground attendance, Department of Parks and Recreation officials believe a significant factor in this year's increase was the reduction in camping fees.

The new attendance report shows there were 711,538 visitors to State Park campgrounds from Jan. 1 through March 31, 2001, the most recent period available for review. The average attendance for the first three months of the previous three years was 581,366, according to the report.

The report said there were 12.1 million paid day visits to state parks during the first three months of 2001, while the average for the previous three years during the same period was 7.8 million, it said. The trend is expected to continue.

"Vacancies in our campsites will be going fast," said Areias. "We are gearing up to do what we can to help the public find what they want, somewhere in our system."

Department of Parks and Recreation officials are offering a number of tips for campers this summer:

- **Plan ahead for reservation Sites.** Campers may make reservations up to seven months in advance through Reserve America at 1-800-444-7275, and visit their website at <http://www.parks.ca.gov/travel/online.htm>
- **Determine where you want to camp and be flexible.** Have alternate parks in mind in case your first choice is booked. Check the State Park website at <http://www.parks.ca.gov> for information.
- **Consider Non-reservation Sites:** If the reservation sites are full, look for the first-come, first-served campgrounds and try and arrive on a Tuesday or Wednesday to maximize your chance to get a campsite.
- **Consider less busy months:** Summer is the busiest time of the year, so try and take your vacation during the "off season" – April, May or after Labor Day.
- **Consider less busy days:** Sometimes reservations are easier to make if you can camp mid-week.
- **Consider less popular camps:** Southern coastal campgrounds can be full year-round. You could have better luck getting reservations at state parks north of Santa Cruz or inland. Look for sites, which are more remote, away from major metropolitan areas.
- **Remember the holiday crush:** The closer you try to make reservations to a holiday (Memorial Day weekend, Fourth of July, Labor Day weekend), the further north and inland you may need to go.
- **Consider cancellations:** Check the ReserveAmerica website or call the 800-444-7275 phone number. Cancellations are rare, but they can happen.
- **Try day use.** If the campgrounds you want are booked, consider visiting the park for a day for a picnic, hike or other outdoor recreation.